



Group honors Blithewold expert

Julie Morris, the historic mansion's director of horticulture, will be recognized at a statewide conference.

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Blithewold's director of horticulture will be honored at next month's Statewide Historic Preservation Conference for her work preserving the restored mansion's famous gardens on the Bristol waterfront.

Julie Morris, a horticulturist for more than 40 years, will be presented with the Frederick C. Williamson Award for Professional Leadership at the 21st annual conference, which will be held April 8, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet in Cranston.

The award is one of the highest honors given by the state Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission and is meant to recognize someone whose work can be a model for others.

"Hands-on practitioner, educator, advocate, administrator, fundraiser. Few landscape professionals can match the range and depth of [Morris's] abilities," a statement from the commission reads.

Morris began her career in the early 1960s managing Valley Gardens, in Chestnut Hill, Pa. She was also the horticultural librarian and staff horticulturist at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, where she organized exhibits and established educational programs for inner-city students.

At Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum, she oversees educational programming, organizes volunteer gardeners, grows plants and designs plantings on the 33-acre property.

She has also managed the \$350,000 renovation of the estate's 105-year-old greenhouse, which has been funded in part by a state preservation grant. The Newport Art Museum will also be honored at the conference. It will receive a project award for the \$5-million restoration of the John N.A. Griswold House, which the historical preservation commission describes as "a masterpiece of American architecture."

The house was completed in 1864 and is recognized as a prototype of the "stick style" in architecture. Occupied by the Newport Art Museum since 1916, the house has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

The eight-year project to restore the house was overseen by Burt Hill Kosar Rittlemann Associates, a Boston-based architecture firm. The work included stabilizing the exterior and repainting it, and installing a new elevator, handicapped-accessible restrooms, fire-suppression systems, heating and ventilating equipment and new wiring.

"The thorough restoration and rehabilitation of Griswold House reaffirms the Newport Art Museum's curatorial commitment to the most important work of art in [its] collection," the commission writes in a statement.

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